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The Capture of Richmond

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Feb 25th 1924.

General Ripley and Staff at the Last Headquarters of the 1st Brigade, 3d Division, 24th Army Corps. Taken June, 1865

The Capture and Occupation of Richmond

April 3rd, 1865

By

Edward H. Ripley

Col. 9th Vt. Inf. and Brevet Brig.-Genl. Vols.

Commanding 1st Brigade, 3rd Division, 24th Army Corps, Army of the James

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FINAL SCENES AT THE CAPTURE AND OCCUPATION OF RICHMOND, APRIL 3, 1865.

Read by Brevet Brigadier-General Edward H. Ripley, Dec. 5, 1906.

THIS paper is the story of the work of the First Brigade, Third Division, of the Twenty-fourth Army Corps, which I had the honor to command at the capture and occupation of Richmond, April 3, 1865. It was written soon after the war to fill a gap in a collection of some 400 of my war letters collected and preserved by a thoughtful mother, and is a description of an historical event which for grandeur and spectacular effect had few if any equals in the course of the Civil War. It necessarily is written in the first person; but a veteran who has the right to say proudly, of any event of interest in the Civil War in which he participated, "A part of which I was" will understand it.

On the night of the 27th of March, 1865, the First Division of the Twenty-fourth Army Corps, under Brigadier-General Robert S. (" Sandy") Foster of Indiana, and the independent division, under Brevet Major-General John W. Turner, led by Major-General John Gibbon, our corps commander, and accompanied by Major-General E. O. C. Ord, the commander of the Army of the James, then holding the lines on the Bermuda front and the north side of the James River, stealthily withdrew from their trenches in front of Richmond, and by daylight of the 28th had crossed the river and were well on their way to the left of the Army of the Potomac. There they took their full share of the bloody battles which Meade and Sheridan delivered in quick succession, until Lee, breathless and

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exhausted, gave up the contest and surrendered at Appomattox Courthouse.

Our division, the Third of the Twenty-fourth Army Corps, under Brigadier-General Charles Devens, was left behind to extend over and hold the trenches thus evacuated. That night I was withdrawn from our position at the right of Fort Harrison, and stretched out in a thin line over the ground recently held by the three brigades of Foster's division. Daylight broke to find me established in General Foster's abandoned headquarters at the sallyport on the Newmarket road, at the salient of our lines, where we approached most nearly to Richmond.

Here a new regiment was added to my command, and about 500 convalescents and stragglers, representing nearly every regiment in the other two divisions, were organized into a regiment, equipped, and taken upon my rolls. The brigade then comprised the following regiments:

The staff, 7.	Officers.	Men.	
11th Ct.	26	412	Major Chas. Warren commanding.
13th N. H.	13	247	Lieutenant-Colonel Norman Smith commanding.
19th Wis.	15	308	Major Vaughn commanding.
81st N. Y.	11	83	Captain Betton commanding.
98th N. Y.	17	268	Lieutenant-Colonel William Kreutzer commanding.
139th N. Y.	16	306	Major Theo. Miller commanding.
Convalescents	14	546	
A total of	119	2250	

Of these my morning report showed 91 officers and 2219 privates for duty, and 90 officers and 1950 privates effective.

We lay here without incident until Saturday evening, the 1st of April, when I received orders from General Grant to hold the brigade under arms all night, massed and ready for an assault on the enemy's works in our front; to spend the night out on the outer vidette line, carefully watch for

signs of unusual movements on the part of the enemy with whom we were in close contact, and, if I became suspicious of uneasiness on their part, to send word to General Weitzel, the commander of the colored corps and of the forces left on the north bank of the James, and assault at once on my own responsibility.

When taps sounded that night the brigade was silently massed in bivouac in column behind the sally through our works across the Newmarket road.

Our videttes and those of the rebels were within easy conversing distance, so that it seemed impossible for them to make any movement unobserved.

It was a clear, starlight night, still and beautiful. I can experience again through the lapse of the years, as my thoughts go back to that dramatic scene, the peaceful round of the hours, as I lay with my ear to the ground, listening for a sign of life among the slumbering hosts of friends and foes that environed me.

Hour after hour at the same moment the officers of the pickets on both sides came up from the reserves and passed along, the hushed sound of low voices breaking the solemn stillness for a moment as the videttes reported to their relief, and then with catlike caution retired to rest in the conscious unconsciousness of a picket reserve.

Sunday morning came with no apparent knowledge on the part of the enemy of the gigantic blow that was uplifted in the air beyond the Weldon Railroad and already descending full of fate to the doomed Confederacy. They stayed quietly in their camps, enjoying a peaceful Sabbath, under the observation of the look-outs I had posted in the tops of trees along my front.

Bursting full of great events as we knew the week would be, nearing the end, as we saw from the crowds of despairing Confederates who nightly threw away their arms and with them all hope of their cause, and came into our lines, not a man of us dreamed when night came that of all the laborious Sundays of the long years we had passed with an armed foe in our front, this was the last.

As evening came the order for redoubled vigilance was repeated. In had been a day of unusual solemnity, lying through the dragging hours in the straining suspense of waiting for the fateful word that would dash us against those fearful walls of red earth, deep ditches, impenetrable abattis, and thickly planted torpedoes, from which so many bloody assaults of columns heavier than ours had been hurled back with ease. It is not enjoyable to stand through a long day and coolly contemplate the desperate chances of a forlorn hope, which was expected not to win, but to amuse the enemy and hold him in place.

The night fell cloudy and dark as I plunged into the mysterious silence and gloom for my last night on the picket line. It passed uneventfully, as the preceding one had passed, except that blue mist settled on the earth. About 4 o'clock in the morning a column of flame suddenly shot high in the air in the direction of Richmond, quickly followed by another and another. Then came the subdued hum of noises far away toward the doomed city. To my eager ears, drinking in the sounds from that mighty primeval telephone the earth, as I lay with my ear pressed closely to it, the low, supernatural rumbling seemed as though its interior was alive with the busy motion of its myriad of the dead. Still, strangely, no sound came from our immediate front. We strained our eyes in vain to catch sight, through the mist and darkness, of the opposing videttes. The first gray of dawn showed us that, favored by the night and the mist, they had, with the stillness of ghosts, been stealthily withdrawn.

I quickly deployed our picket line as skirmishers, pushed them on, and followed closely with the brigade, ready to deploy, sending word to General Weitzel, through General Devens, that I was advancing to the assault and to hurry up supports. This was the first movement of any of the troops along the Union line, and as we gained the parapet of the rebel fortifications we found it deserted.

Pushing my skirmishers still forward I looked down the line of Union defence toward Fort Brady—our left, resting

on the James, which this higher ground commanded in its view—to see if the forward movement was general. Skirmishers were advancing, but at that moment, we alone were in possession of the enemy's works. Alone the First Brigade of the Third division, Twenty-fourth Army Corps, entirely unsupported, was within the renowned and impregnable defences of the rebel capital, happily without loss, although the front of their abattis was planted thick with torpedoes.

Understanding that the order to assault quickly upon detecting any movement of the enemy meant that General Grant wished General Ewell, commanding the Confederate forces on the north side of the James, attacked and held at all hazards, I pushed on with the utmost haste to overtake him and force him to fight. When first over the works the excitement was intense and the men rushed wildly in every direction, capturing and claiming guns for their respective regiments, until a howling maniac in blue sat astride of every one of the thickly planted guns in reach. It was some time before the enthusiasm could be controlled and the men got back to their ranks. The onward movement to the second or inner line was rapid but cautious, not knowing at what moment we might strike Ewell's rear guard, waiting for us behind them.

At every instant the terrific explosions in the direction of Richmond grew more frequent and great volumes of black smoke rolled up into the heavens, showing that the work of destruction begun by the rebels themselves was going rapidly on.

The slower advance, while feeling our way over the second line, gave the balance of our division time to overtake us, which they did, falling in behind the First Brigade.

The headquarters cavalry, commanded by Major Stevens of General Weitzel's staff, now passed us, and a light battery came dashing up demanding the way on the Newmarket road, apparently filled with a crazy ambition to gallop on, attack Ewell, and capture the city with unsupported guns. In possession of the road, and knowing no use for artillery on the skirmish line, we refused to yield it. The eager,

crack-brained young officer in command, frenzied with the wild joy with which every heart was throbbing, seeing an open field extending some distance ahead along our left flank, rushed into it with his horses lashed into a mad gallop and tried to run in ahead of us. The 13th New Hampshire, at the head of the column, broke of its own inspiration into a sharp double-quick until the too impetuous young artilleryman found himself pocketed in a swamp with which the field was terminated. He then fell into his proper place in the rear of the brigade.

From the second line, then past the inner batteries to Rocketts, where it became more certain that Ewell had made good his escape and there was to be no fight over the city, not even with his rear guard, I rode backward and forward along the column, exchanging congratulations with the officers, and looking down into the flashing eyes and quivering faces of the men as they glanced up at me in the mute freemasonry of a common joy and glory. It was hardly needed, so eager and furious was the march and so well closed up the ranks from the anxiety of the rear regiments to grasp the long-fought-for prize as soon as the head of the column, but as I drifted back and forth along the flank, and occasionally sat still in my saddle to enjoy the sight of the long column rushing by, I sang out, as of old, but never before so exultingly, that old, old song which will never die out from the ears of the veteran until death shall close them, "Close up, boys! Close up! No straggling in the ranks of the First Brigade to-day. Close up! Close up!"

It was my last, as I stood up in my stirrups singing the last refrain of a song sung for three long years: in the golden sunshine of Southern springs, in the fierce heat and choking dust of Southern summers, the mud and frosts and snows of winter. Harsh, heartless, inexorable, it had risen and pierced the midnight air in that valley crowded with the tragedies of the war,—the Shenandoah with its quickly alternating triumphs and defeats,—on the Peninsula with its deadly miasmas, and North Carolina amid the gloom of its tar forests and the slumping of its soft

sands. Through the weary hours of the night it had risen like the weird cry of the owl—"Close up, men! Close up! Close up, men! Close up!"

I stood there on the threshold of the rebel capital, with the old cry upon my lips, and knew not that at that moment, by our incredible presence within those fateful lines, the cruel war was at last over, and that that peace we had so longed and prayed for, triumphant peace, hovered over us and that I should never again haunt the flank of a marching column with a heart steeled against all its natural sympathies, and shout to men sick in body, sick at heart, lame, foot-sore and exhausted,—"Close up, men! Close up!" I am glad that the last note of this cry fell a glad refrain upon the ears of an exultant column, and glad that I can look back in my memory into faces lighted up with joy, instead of being haunted with the last memory of faces stamped with the misery and wretchedness of a cruelly forced march.

At last, about 7 o'clock in the morning, we approached Rocketts, the steamboat landing at the lower end of the city, where the rebel iron-clads had been lying. There I received orders to deploy a strong line of guards across from the river up the ravine of Gillies Creek, with orders to permit no one to pass, but to turn every one back to join his command, and get ready for the formal entry into the city. I was also ordered to dress up my own command and put all my regimental bands at the head of the column. I happened to have the unusual number of three. While this was going on an iron-clad, which was lying in the stream abreast of us, the last of all the river fleet, blew up with a terrible concussion, nearly knocking us off our feet and overwhelming us with a tempest of black smoke, cinders, and débris. I do not remember that any one was injured, yet a part of it went over our heads into the fields beyond. The roar of the exploding arsenals, magazines, and warehouses filled with explosives of the ordnance bureau was deafening and awe-inspiring.

At this moment Col. Geo. W. Hooker, assistant adjutant-

general of the Third Division, rode up to me and said: "You are in luck to-day, General. General Weitzel has given orders that you are to have the head of the column in the triumphal entry which we are ready to make into the city." I was, of course, elated at this, for it would have been natural for General Weitzel to have given to the colored troops of his own corps the place of honor for this historical pageant, as Horace Greeley, in his history of *The American Conflict*, wrongly avers that he did, ignoring the presence of any but colored troops in Richmond that day. This would have been, however, great injustice to General Devens and to me, for my brigade of his division was the first over the line, and the first to reach the city at Rocketts, and Devens's was the only division which kept its formation perfect and could have attacked Ewell had he come to bay. My brigade was at that moment at the head of the column because we had taken it and kept it, and it belonged to us as a right and not as a courtesy. No one got ahead of us but the little squad of headquarters cavalry, which had overtaken and passed us, and which did not pass the enemy's lines until after my message had reached General Devens and been sent by him to Weitzel.

At length every preparation was completed that could give to the entry of the Union troops an imposing character. No time could be wasted on this, as we seemed about to plunge into a sea of fire, or rather the crater of an active volcano, and if any portion of the doomed capital was to be saved it had to be done quickly. When the word came, with my three bands at the head of my column, I turned in my saddle and cried "Forward!" to the eager troops. The bands had arranged a succession of Union airs which had not been heard for years in thestreets of the Confederate capital, and had arranged to relieve each other so that there should be no break in the exultant strain of patriotic music during any portion of the march.

The route was up Main Street to Exchange Hotel, then across by Governor Street to Capitol Square. The city was packed with a surging mob of Confederate stragglers, ne-

groes, and released convicts, and mob rule had been supreme from the moment Ewell had crossed the James and burned the bridges behind him.

The air was darkened by the thick tempest of black smoke and cinders which swept the streets, and as we penetrated deeper into the city the bands were nearly drowned by the crashing of the falling walls, the roar of the flames, and the terrific explosions of shells in the burning warehouses.

Densely packed on either side of the street were thousands upon thousands of blacks, until that moment slaves in fact, for the emancipation proclamation had never before penetrated the rebel territory to strike their fetters off. They fell upon their knees, throwing their hands wildly in the air and shouting: "Glory to God! Glory to God! The day of Jubilee hab come; Massa Linkum am here! Massa Linkum am here!" while floods of tears poured down their wild faces. They threw themselves down on their hands and knees almost under our horses' feet to pray and give thanks in the wild delirium of their sudden deliverance. Although the shops had been gutted and were open, the houses were closed, and when we reached the better residence portion of the city the blinds were tightly shut and none of the better class of the whites were to be seen, though we occasionally saw an eye peering through the blinds.

At the gate of the square opposite the north entrance of the Confederate capitol grounds an aide-de-camp of General Weitzel was waiting with orders to halt the head of the column there and report to him at the eastern porch. I passed through the gate into the park, followed by my staff and cavalry escort, and made my way to him. I found the lawn and shrubbery, through which the black smoke and burning cinders were swirling, crowded with the headquarters cavalry of the corps and division commanders. Upon the broad landing at the head of the tall flight of steps stood General Weitzel and staff, the noble personality of General Devens with his staff, and grouped around were the division commanders of the Twenty-fifth Corps of colored troops,

with the Hon. Joseph Mayo, the mayor of the city, and other city officials.

These gentleman had driven out in a barouche to a point where they met the head of the column and tendered, with theatrical effect, the keys of the fallen city, and begged the clemency and help of the Northern victors.

I dismounted and ascended to General Weitzel, who stood the central figure of this brilliant historical scene. I saluted and waited in innocent curiosity his orders, unsuspecting the distinguished honors the First Brigade was to receive at his hands.

"I have sent for you, General Ripley," he said, "to inform you that I have selected you to take command of this city and your brigade as its garrison. I have no orders further to communicate; except to say that I wish this conflagration stopped, and this city saved if it is in the bounds of human possibility, and you have *carte blanche* to do it in your own way."

I do not remember exchanging any suggestions with him then, except to say that I would like the other troops withdrawn wholly from the city. He thereupon gave orders to the division commanders to march their troops through the city and go into camp along the interior line of works and give no passes.

This was done, yet I had more or less trouble from the disorder of the colored troops, many of whom stole in and went directly to their old masters and mistresses to enjoy their day of triumph over them. It was reported to me that one went to a residence not far from my headquarters down Main Street, where his wife was still a servant. They made the lady and her daughters bring out their finest clothing and ornaments, play ladies' maids to the black women, and finally prepare dinner for their former servants. While it was going on word was sent to a white safeguard near there, who appeared on the scene to arrest the man. He turned savagely on the guard, who in turn was obliged in self-defence to use his bayonet and run him through. In the hurry and confusion of those intensely absorbing days

Garrison Flag of the Libby Prison, hauled down April 3, 1865

I never had time to learn for myself if this story was true.

Leaving General Weitzel I returned to the brigade, hurriedly selected the city hall for my headquarters, despatched regimental commanders under the guidance of the city officials to select in various sections of the city proper points at which to establish their regiments for effective work. Other officers were sent with members of the fire department to get at the engines and hose carts, but found to our utter astonishment and dismay that, to make the destruction of their capital more certain and complete, the Confederate rear guard had cut the hose and disabled the engines.

The alleged destruction of Columbia by the troops of Sherman's army, if it were true, which it is not, cannot be compared with the ruthless barbarity of the rebel troops.

At Richmond they attempted the destruction of their capital, filled as it was to overflowing with thousands of defenceless women and children, fugitives from all over the South, and with thousands more of the sick and wounded of their own army, when its destruction could not have the effect to sustain the sinking Confederacy for a moment. It was a barbarism unparalleled in history. The burning of Moscow by the stern Rostopschin was terrible but effective warfare, yet he first drove the unfortunate inhabitants out, then piled the city full of combustibles, destroyed the pumps, and turned loose thousands of abandoned wretches, criminals of the worst class, in an empty city. He destroyed it, but in so doing snatched in an instant the fruits of his great campaign from Napoleon, inflicting on him the greatest defeat he had ever sustained, from which he never recovered and which was the beginning of his downward plunge to Elba.

There is nothing in the pages of history more wantonly brutal and barbarous than the desperate attempt of Ewell to burn the city of Richmond over the heads of its defenceless and starving women and children, its sick and wounded, without warning them of the fate which was hanging over them.

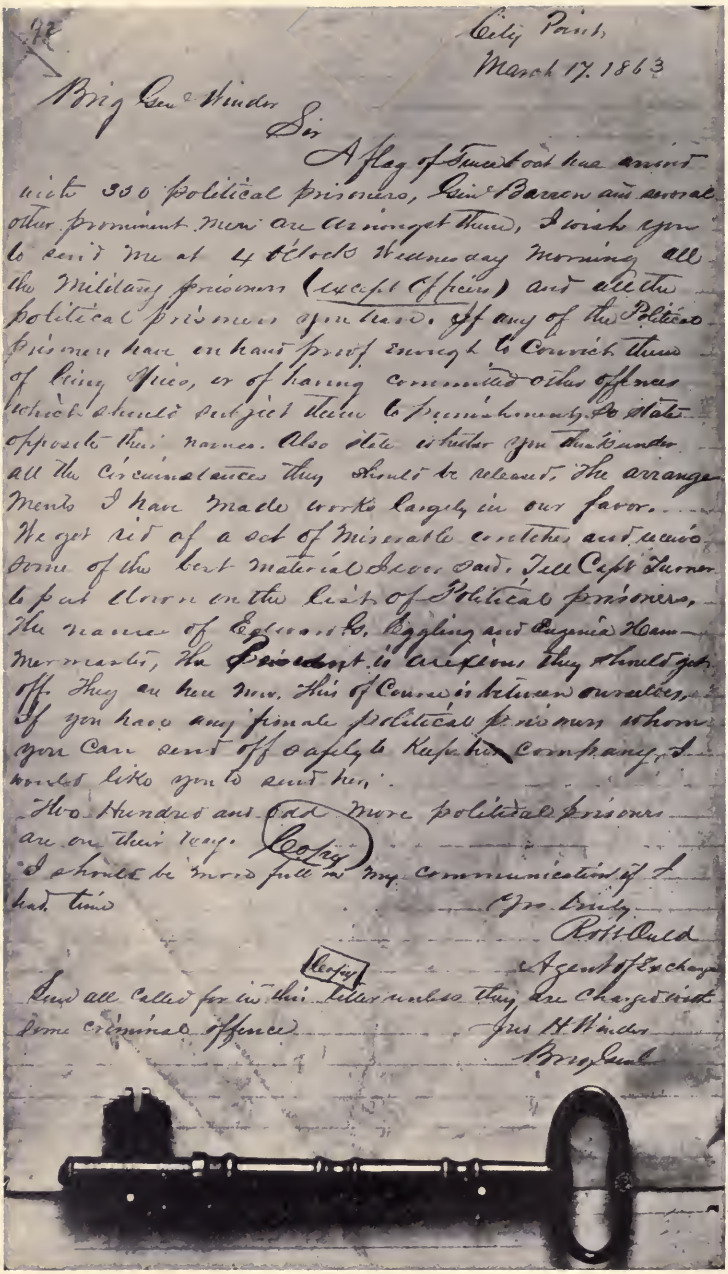
The Confederacy, like a wounded wolf, died gnawing at its own body in insensate passion and fury.

The regiments quickly stripped for the fight of their lives, unique and terrible, a contest with a gigantic fire extending already over a large part of the city, and roaring like a great battle with the explosions of the vast store of war materials, and threatening the destruction of the entire city with its helpless inhabitants.

None of the usual fire-fighting machinery was at hand. The retreating army of Ewell had cut the hose; the Richmond firemen were unequal to the task, so the First Brigade had to depend upon blowing up and pulling down buildings in the pathway of the flames to check them. Happily the wind blew down the river and carried the flames and cinders in a straight line through the business and away from the residence section.

All day long and into the night the brave men of the Northern army battled with desperate courage and splendid self-sacrifice to save the apparently doomed capital of those mistaken men who were yet fighting under Lee with dogged obstinacy to destroy this great union of States. Had it been for their own homes and firesides their fight could not have been more heroic. When midnight came the fires were checked and under control and the city saved. The horrible roar of the flames still went up, with the crashing of falling walls and explosions of ordnance stores; but the fire was headed off and the exhausted troops rested.

As quickly as possible one of the staff was sent to Libby prison and to Castle Thunder to liberate any prisoners there, and to organize a guard for the care of the thousands of Confederate stragglers and pillagers who were being arrested by the provost guards in clearing the streets. They hauled down and brought to me the garrison flag that had floated over the Libby prison and witnessed the terrible sufferings of the thousands of Union officers packed inside its walls. They brought away also the official record of the prison, with its tell-tale confession of inhumanity contained in the



City Point,
March 17. 1863

Brig Gen'l Winder

Sir

A flag of truce boat has arrived with 350 political prisoners, Genl Barrow and several other prominent men are amongst them, I wish you to send me at 4 o'clock Wednesday morning all the Military prisoners (except Officers) and all the political prisoners you have. If any of the Political prisoners have on hand proof enough to convict them of being Spies, or of having committed other offences which should subject them to punishment, state opposite their names. Also state whether you think under all the circumstances they should be released. The arrangements I have made works largely in our favor. We get rid of a set of miserable wretches and receive some of the best material I ever had. Tell Capt Turner to put down on the list of Political prisoners, the names of Edmund B. Riggins and Virginia Hammermarks, the President to except them, they should get off. They are here now. This of course is between ourselves. If you have any female political prisoners whom you can send off safely & keep their coming, I would like you to send them.

Two Hundred and Odd more political prisoners are on their way. Copy

I should be more full in my communication if I had time

Yrs truly
Robt Ould
Agent of Exchange

Copy

Send all called for in this letter unless they are charged with some criminal offence

Jas H Winder
Brig Genl

Facsimile of the letter of Judge Ould, Rebel Commissioner of Exchange, to General Winder, referred to on opposite page, and the key to the Libby Prison, both now in the possession of General Edward H. Ripley.

celebrated letter of Judge Ould, commissioner of exchange, to General Winder, commandant of the Libby and Castle Thunder, in which Ould shamelessly boasts of an arrangement he had made by which he gets rid of a "lot of broken-down and worthless Yankees in exchange for Confederates in splendid condition." They also brought the key to the main entrance to the Libby, which turned on every Union officer ever incarcerated there. This key, comrades, which I hold in my hand, is the key of that American Bastile, and to you, General Pierson, and to you other companions who in your golden youth were thrust within that gloomy portal, and with the rattle of this fatal key left your young hopes behind, I extend in the name of this Commandery our hearty congratulations that, having endured such sufferings, you have survived to encounter this key again after more than forty years amid such genial surroundings. Later the guard of the executive mansion of Jefferson Davis brought me an infernal machine in the shape of an imitation lump of coal, which he took from a writing desk used by President Davis. This was used to throw in the coal bunkers of our war-ships to blow them up. I have also the great seal of the Confederacy, together with a monograph of its history; also the original designs submitted at Montgomery for the new flag of the Confederacy. All these are in my possession and to be seen in my collection of Civil War relics in the Soldiers' Memorial Hall at Rutland.

Among the many trophies of the war I did not succeed in keeping were the flags of the celebrated Richmond Howitzers, which had been presented to them by the Richmond ladies. They seemed too heavy, with their rich embroidery of gold bullion, to flutter even in a gale of wind. I have never seen any flags so extravagant in costliness. They must have been the product of the first wild enthusiasm of secession, before the grinding poverty had settled down upon the people and it took thousands of Confederate paper money to buy a pair of boots. One day General Weitzel sent Lieutenant Graves of his staff to say he had heard of them, and would be pleased if I would let them be brought

up for his inspection. Graves promised to return them, but I never saw them again.

It was with supreme satisfaction that the cavalry swept the streets of the Confederates and clapped them into Libby, giving them a taste of their own prisons. The next morning when I rode past it was so full they boiled up on the roof.

After opening headquarters in the city hall, my first official action was to prepare, print, and have placarded over the city an order commanding all good citizens to aid the military authorities in restoring order by retiring to their homes, keeping closely within doors, and threatening with arrest any citizens who should be found on the streets after nightfall. I ordered the daily papers to be taken possession of and prepared for issue under loyal management, and directed patrols upon every street to arrest the drunken mob of pillagers who were running riot, and to bring the pillaged property to the city hall, where it was taken by an officer, receipted for, and piled away in various back rooms of the building, until an immense and curious mass of plunder was accumulated. My office was at once besieged and taken possession of by crowds of terror-stricken ladies whose minds had been filled with the wicked and outrageous calumnies heaped upon the Northern troops by the Richmond papers, and who expected that the régime initiated by their own people was but the prelude to the reign of terror which the "Yankee monsters" would inaugurate when settled in the possession of the city.

TERROR OF THE WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Old ladies came and threw themselves on my neck in paroxysms of terror and implored me to save them; others clung to my arms until they had extracted a personal pledge from me; others threw themselves on the floor and grasped my knees until I would promise them a soldier safeguard in their own house. One lady, deeply veiled, came in great excitement, and leaning on my shoulder whispered in my ear, "I am the daughter of General Keim of Pennsylvania,

Infernal machine, in imitation of a lump of coal, taken from the writing-desk of Jefferson Davis, April 3, 1865

and I appeal to you as a Northern woman for protection." I replied warmly, "As a Northern woman you ought to know that you do not need to make such an appeal." I gave her at random the first private soldier I could put my hands on as a safeguard, and sent him home with her to be responsible for the safety of the block in which she lived. Of her experience with this average Northern soldier I will later on tell the story.

General Sterns of Longstreet's corps left a letter with his wife confiding her and her children to the care of the officer commanding the victorious Northern troops, saying he intrusted them to him as soldier to soldier.

Another lady, dressed in the deepest weeds, shivering like an aspen leaf with terror, her face concealed with a crape veil, whispered in my ear, "I am the widow of General Gracie [a Confederate general killed shortly before at Petersburg], and I appeal to you as a soldier's widow to a brother soldier to protect me and my fatherless children." She then told me that she had a large family of young children, that they had had nothing to eat for several weeks but bean soup, and that to cook it they had to burn up their bannister rail and other portions of their house. I turned her over to the care of my old college tutor Millard, and his Christian Commission, whom I had installed in the room across the hall from my office in the city hall, and who took care for me of the crowds of ladies who applied for protection and aid; rendering me most effective and timely service for several days by writing safeguards, which they brought to me to sign, the violation of which by a soldier was death. I afterward sent an aide to visit Mrs. Gracie and ascertain her most pressing necessities, and supplied her with rations from my mess until I was able to get her transportation to her friends in the North.

The staff officers assigned to the distribution and domiciling of guards in the private residences sent soldiers home with the ladies who had thronged headquarters, aiming to place a soldier in the centre house of each two opposite blocks, making him responsible for their safety. These

safeguards remained in these families from ten days to two weeks, in most cases treated as guests rather than as guards. They were men taken indiscriminately from regiments of Wisconsin, Connecticut, New Hampshire, northern and central New York, and from Brooklyn, and were therefore a fair representation of the soldiers of Devens's division and consequently of the Twenty-fourth Army Corps. I not only never heard a complaint of any rudeness or roughness, but, on the contrary, there was unstinted praise of their civil as well as military qualities and bearing, so unexpected in them by the Richmond ladies.

SOLDIERLY BEARING OF THE UNION MEN.

And here I may illustrate by relating the story of one, as told me by both Mr. and Mrs. Wirt Robinson, the latter of whom was the daughter of General Keim of Reading, Pa., referred to earlier. I personally escorted Mrs. Robinson to the hall and ordered the soldier standing at the head of the line to sling his knapsack and go with the lady to her home and be responsible for its safety and the houses of her neighbors. He shouldered his rifle and fell in behind her as I bade her good morning. There was no personal selection, no especial and minute instructions as to his duties. Mr. Robinson afterward told me that upon entering the house the guard asked where he could deposit his knapsack and his three days' cooked rations where they would be least in the way, and where he could sit. He was given a seat in the hall, where he remained for some little time, after which he remarked to Mr. Robinson that he saw he had a library, and if it would not inconvenience any one it would be a pleasure to him to sit there and make use of the books, as it had been a long time since he had had access to any. Mr. Robinson politely told him, of course, the whole house was at his disposal. Several hours later, hearing nothing from his once dreaded Yankee invader, he stole quietly into the library to find him deeply immersed in a very serious metaphysical work; he engaged him in conversation, and to his profound

Facsimile of the cover of the Order Book of the Libby Prison.

surprise found this bronzed, war-worn veteran, private soldier of the North, was a college graduate and a professional man. Although they had little to offer, and his haversack was as substantial as their meagre Confederate larder, they welcomed him as an honored guest, and gladly gave him their best hospitality. The next day I sent them supplies from my mess, and in return Mr. Robinson, who was an old-fashioned *bon-vivant*, and had not the heart to literally obey the stern edict of the city officials to destroy all wines and liquors before the Yankee vandals arrived, having hidden store of priceless old Serchal Madeiras, which had made the East Indian voyage many times in Richmond merchant vessels, brought it out and promptly sent me a carboy.

Referring again to the experience of the Richmond ladies with the private soldiers of the North, Mrs. Gracie, the widow of General Gracie, of the Confederate army, in a note to me wrote: "Your guard is quite a literary character, and I have been searching among all the old books I have to find him something to read. We have had no use for novels in the Confederacy: alas! our lives have proved novels of themselves."

Again later: "Your guard has proved himself a treasure. I could not do without him, he is so efficient. I cannot thank you enough for giving him to me; indeed, between him, the nice candles, and a respectable fire, which you so kindly sent me, I am beginning to feel a little civilized." I could give many more such acknowledgments of their admiration of our soldiers.

On the other hand, from women of the commoner class, we had experiences not unlike those of our troops at the capture of New Orleans. While they were uncertain what the Yankees were going to do with them, frightened, and clamoring for our protection, they were polite enough in their manners; but as soon as they realized we were not ruffians, but soldiers, respecting their sex, their behavior quickly changed, and many of them assumed an insulting manner toward our troops and our flag.

The 13th regiment of New Hampshire, composed of an

unusually fine lot of New England men, was quartered in a large market on lower Main Street, and particularly annoyed by these very ungrateful and unwomanly demonstrations. Its colors, state and national, were hung out from its porch, guarded by a sentry, who paced his beat along the sidewalk; and although they owed the safety of their persons, their property, and the preservation of their city to the generous and gallant efforts of the men who fought under those colors, many of these women would pull up their skirts, wrap them carefully to one side, and with every expression of loathing and hatred go out into the middle of the street to avoid passing under them.

Lieutenant-Colonel Norman Smith, commanding the regiment, a brave officer, who was seriously wounded in the famous assault on Fort Harrison, under General Stannard, was ordered to detail some officer tactful and firm to escort every woman who attempted this back, and quietly, and with more politeness than they were entitled to receive, make them understand that we would tolerate no insults to our uniform or colors, but that they must cease such demonstrations or encounter severe measures. This soon had its effect and we saw no more of it.

A NIGHT WITH THE FLAMES.

At about 2 o'clock in the morning I got sufficient respite from the exertions of the day to get into the saddle and make an inspection of my command. Accompanied by my staff, I rode through the sleeping city from one end to the other. Not a human being was encountered of all the destroying mob who had filled it to overflowing in the morning. On every alternate corner stood the motionless form of a sentry; not a ray of light from a house gave hint of life within, except at a corner grocery, where light was detected through a crack in the shutters. The sharp rap of an aide's sabre hilt on the door brought out a panic-stricken German grocer, who had been too frightened to go to bed, and who was sitting up with the few worldly goods he had left. For hours

we passed up and down the streets, which echoed with the clatter of our horses' hoofs and the jingle of our sabres, astonished at the discipline which had been established in so few hours out of chaos. Returning we left the brigade headquarters cavalry in the rear of the house, the men in reliefs at their horses' heads, and our horses saddled and bridled ready for any alarm.

It was near morning when we gave ourselves up to rest in the house of Mrs. Allen, which we had selected for our domestic headquarters, and enjoyed the delicious and novel intoxication of rest on real beds under a roof after three long years of campaigning. This was not altogether a realization of our dream of domestic repose, however, as we dare not undress or even pull off our boots or lay aside our arms.

There has been much written on the subject of Ewell's responsibility for this terrible war measure, and I have this autograph letter from his brother, Prof. Benj. S. Ewell, of William and Mary College, dated Richmond, April, 1865. It reads as follows:

SIR:—In relation to General Ewell and the late disastrous conflagration in this city, I ask to make the following statement: After the fall of Savannah, Ga., the Confederate Congress passed a law requiring officers in command to destroy all cotton, tobacco, and other valuable products liable to capture. Some weeks ago General Ewell received official notice of this law, and with it an order to prepare for the destruction of the tobacco, etc., stored in Richmond, that could not be carried away, the destruction to be completed in the event of evacuation. He immediately notified the parties concerned of the order, directing all tobacco not removed to be deposited in some place or places where it could be destroyed without danger to the city. The details were intrusted to an officer of his command. For the fire in no way is General Ewell responsible, as in the execution of a military order in respect to which he had no discretion he sought by every means in his power to provide against such a catastrophe as followed.

Very respectfully your obedient servant,

BENJAMIN S. EWELL.

My answer to this was simple enough. General Ewell deliberately chose to instruct his officers to execute this order though it endangered the lives of thousands of helpless women and children and his sick and wounded comrades of Lee's army, who crowded the city, rather than risk that more or less cotton and tobacco should fall into the hands of the hated Yankees when the value of it was not of any importance to the North as a war measure. He invited a holocaust of his own friends to keep us out of a million or two dollars' worth of cotton and tobacco.

Every officer in command must exercise at times his own judgment as to the possibility or desirability of executing even very stringent orders.

VALUABLE RECORDS SAVED.

Among the acts of vandalism we were happily able to arrest, before irreparable damage was done, was the sacking of the Virginia State Library. An officer entering it found the floor covered with the colonial and other records in which it was so rich. They had been wantonly taken from their cases and thrown around. A guard was at once posted over it with imperative orders to let no person pass without written permission from headquarters, and when, several days later, I tried to enter it, it was with difficulty I could persuade my own guard to let me pass. The floor was yet covered with an interesting mass of time-worn papers. I believe little real damage was done to these valuable archives.

The Confederate archives, such as were left in the hurried retreat, were the most interesting and important spoils of our capture, and the first things sought for and guarded, together with the contents of the telegraph offices. These I some days later, on the arrival of Chas. A. Dana, Assistant Secretary of War, turned over to him. One half of the large accumulation of copies of the Confederate telegraph dispatches were found, the other half have never been found. They were said to have been carried off by a woman on the day of our entry.

A report having come to me that Mrs. Robert E. Lee, who had left the city hurriedly, was very ill and wished to return to her home, I sent an ambulance to assist her; and after Appomattox and General Lee's home-coming I arranged to protect him as much as possible from the annoyance of the curious public which had begun to throng from the North to this famous stronghold of the Confederacy.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S VISIT.

As fast as possible the Confederate prisoners were paroled and urged to lay aside their gray uniforms, take to citizen's dress, and aid in the maintenance of order, which they very generally and in good spirit did. They were mostly men who on the abandonment of their capital saw that further fighting was useless and upon the retreat of Ewell's corps quietly stayed behind. One of these came to my quarters on the day of Mr. Lincoln's arrival on Admiral Porter's flag-ship, *Malvern*, April 4th, and begged an interview. The streets were crowded during the daytime with excited throngs of negroes and whites, and we were very uneasy at Mr. Lincoln's insistence upon visiting all interesting points. We tried to make him consent to an escort, but he would not allow it, and strolled through the city like a private citizen, followed by crowds of people, white and black. It was a very dangerous thing to do, and we were obliged, unknown to him, to surround him with a crowd of detectives in citizen's dress, heavily armed. His reception by the emancipated negroes was dramatic in the extreme. The War and Navy Departments were particularly anxious as to Mr. Lincoln's personal safety, as the following dispatches illustrate:

MR. LINCOLN CAUTIONED.

I.

CITY POINT, April 3, 8:30 A.M.

EDWIN M. STANTON, Secretary of War:

General Grant reports Petersburg evacuated and he is confi-

dent Richmond is taken. He is pushing forward to cut off the retreating army. I start to join him in a few minutes.

A. LINCOLN.

II.

WAR DEPARTMENT, April 3, 10:30 A.M.

TO THE PRESIDENT:

I congratulate you and the nation on the glorious news in your telegram just received. Allow me respectfully to ask you to consider whether you ought to expose the nation to the consequences of any disaster to yourself in the pursuit of a treacherous and dangerous enemy like the rebel army. If it was a question concerning yourself only I should not presume to say a word. Commanding generals are in the line of their duty in running such risks; but is the political head of a nation in the same condition?

EDWIN M. STANTON,
Secretary of War.

III.

CITY POINT, April 3, 5:00 P.M.

EDWIN M. STANTON, Secretary of War:

Thanks for your caution, but I have already been to Petersburg, staid with General Grant an hour and a half, and returned here. It is certain that Richmond is in our hands and I think I will go there to-morrow. I will take care of myself.

A. LINCOLN.

"I will take care of myself." In those six words lay the fate of the great Emancipator.

Admiral Porter in his book writes:

The President was received by General Weitzel, whose headquarters were in the house of the fugitive President of the Confederacy. He took us to the state-house, the Libby prison, and the public offices which had escaped the terrible conflagration of the day before. Late in the afternoon we were greatly relieved to get the President safely back on board the *Malvern*. On Wednesday and Thursday of the following week I was completing my final dispositions for my departure from City Point for Washington, which was hastened by a feeling of nervous apprehension for the President, the result of reflecting upon the risks he ran.

The Confederate soldier alluded to above, who came to my headquarters and begged to have an interview with me on a very important subject, was a more than usually intelligent and fine-appearing man in uniform, by the name of Snyder.

He began by saying that he was an enlisted man in Raine's torpedo bureau, an organization of the Confederate secret service, which had among its duties such services as the blowing up of our magazines and our river steamers, raids on our rear like the St. Albans raid, firing of Northern cities, like the simultaneous attempts on the Fifth Avenue and many other New York hotels, the blowing up of the powder boats at City Point, the distribution of small-pox clothes, etc., etc., in fact all kinds of deviltry and irregular warfare, calculated to create panic or discontent in the rear of the Union armies. Their method was to plan an expedition and detail certain men who never knew what they were to do until they arrived at a designated rendezvous and received their orders.

A CONSPIRACY TO TAKE LINCOLN'S LIFE.

With the capture of Richmond and the abandonment of the Petersburg lines, he believed the war was hopeless and not another gun should be fired. Indeed his conscience told him every life taken now was in a way a wanton murder, and every right-minded man should strive to avert the shedding of another drop of blood. He had seen with the greatest anxiety President Lincoln expose himself to a fearful risk in walking so carelessly unattended and unprotected through the streets filled with people whose hearts in their defeat were bitter, and it would be but human nature for some one to take the opportunity to revenge the lost cause on the person of the man who represented the triumphant cause of the Union.

He then said that what he was particularly anxious to tell me was this:

He knew that a party had just been dispatched from Raine's torpedo bureau on a secret mission, which vaguely he understood

was aimed at the head of the Yankee government, and he wished to put Mr. Lincoln on his guard and have impressed upon him that just at this moment he believed him to be in great danger of violence and he should take the greater care of himself. He could not give names or facts, as the work of his department was secret, and no man knew what his comrade was sent to do, but of this he was convinced, that the President of the United States was in great danger.

Upon expressing willingness to make a statement and swear to it, I called in Captain Staniels, acting assistant adjutant-general, who took down his statement under oath. I then told him I should feel obliged to keep him in custody until I could arrange an interview with President Lincoln. I wrote the President a note and sent it at once aboard the *Malvern*, asking an interview at his earliest leisure on an important matter. It was then about 10 o'clock in the evening. In reply he wrote me a personal note, saying he would see me at 9 o'clock the next morning. I was promptly on hand, taking Snyder and his statement with me.

A MEMORABLE STATEMENT.

Admiral Porter's boat was waiting at the dock. The President received me most cordially in the Admiral's cabin, and then sat down on the long cushioned seat running along the side of the ship behind the dining table, I taking my seat opposite him. Little Tad, who was then a small and very restless boy, amused himself by running up and down the length of the sofa behind his father and jumping over his back in passing. As I progressed in the explanation of my errand, Mr. Lincoln let his head droop upon his hands as his elbows rested on the table, his hands supporting his chin and clasping either cheek in an expression of the most heart-breaking weariness, his great, melancholy eyes filling the cabin with the mournful light they emitted. I read the paper; I urged upon him the reasonableness of the warning, the good faith and apparent integrity of the man, and to make the impression deeper, if possible, I begged him to let me bring him in

and talk with him, but it was all to no purpose. Finally he lifted his head, and, casting upon me that face above all human faces that of a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," he said: "No, General Ripley, it is impossible for me to adopt and follow your suggestions. I deeply appreciate the feeling which has led you to urge them on me,—*but I must go on as I have begun in the course marked out for me, for I cannot bring myself to believe that any human being lives who would do me any harm.*" The interview then ended. He was so worn, emaciated, and pallid that he looked more like a disembodied spirit than the successful leader of a great nation in its hour of supreme triumph. I never saw him again; he left Richmond that afternoon, and City Point for Washington in a few days. My warning to him was on the morning of the 5th of April; on the night of the 15th—a short ten days after—he lay in his blood at Washington, a victim of the wolfish desire for revenge against which Snyder so honestly and prophetically warned him. I have so often thought of the web of fate I held in my impotent hands that morning, and what would have happened to the destinies of this great, new nation which has sprung up out of the blood and agony of that desperate conflict if I had been able to persuade the great President to let his friends protect him until the first rage of the enemy over defeat had expended itself and the realization had come in time to them that he, and his great and generous General Grant were the best and wisest friends they had. Would the miseries and crimes of the reconstruction period have been escaped under his patient, loving leadership, or would it have proved too great a task to bring the sections together and weld them into a sound, healthy body, and the great war President have lived to have been robbed of the lofty prestige in which he died?

No man can answer that question, but I have never had any doubt of his holding a higher place in the Pantheon of immortals because I failed, nor any doubt of the lengthened period of the healing of the wounds of the nation because he yielded to his conviction that he was following a path

marked out for him by a higher power. Still I would like to feel that I had been able to persuade and save him from his tragic fate.

By Wednesday much interest began to be felt in the opening of the churches on Sunday, and the question asked, "How will the ministers conduct service under the new order of things?" I therefore sent an invitation to all these gentlemen to meet me at my headquarters that afternoon to express their views. They all came, to the number of twenty or more, representing every creed. It was not difficult to come to an understanding with the pastors who had no established form of prayer, but the rectors of the Episcopal churches, Messrs. Minnigerode, Peterkin, and others, took the ground that as their form of prayer, established by the church of the South, required prayer for President Davis, no power could change it except that which created it. The controversy was warm and amusing to the onlooker, as I sat in the middle of the parlor of Mrs. Allen's house, a mere boy, with twenty or more reverend gentlemen laying down the ecclesiastical law to me. I cut it short by saying to Rev. Dr. Minnigerode, who did the most of the talking: "You forget, sir, that Richmond is again a part of the United States, and under martial law civil and ecclesiastical law is superseded. The churches will all be open on Sunday, will, no doubt, be thronged with an unusually large attendance, and the services will be conducted with regard to loyalty to the United States. Such of you as recognize this reasonable necessity will not be interfered with, but I have an abundant supply of clergymen to assign to such pulpits as may be needed to conduct loyal services." They then retired, and I crossed the hall to the opposite parlor, where the theatrical managers were assembled, to arrange for the opening of the theatres.

CONTROVERSY WITH THE RICHMOND MINISTERS.

In the morning I received from Dr. Minnigerode a long and warm protest against any interference by the state

with the church, vehemently denying my right to place any minister in his pulpit. This paper is in the *War Records*, where it is published to complete the history of the heated controversy between Secretary Stanton, Assistant Secretary Dana, General Weitzel, and myself, on the subject of the services to be held.

April 9th Dana telegraphed Stanton:

> The churches have all been well filled to-day. The ladies, especially, have attended in great numbers. The regular clergy have prayed, almost without exception. The sermons were devout and not political. The city is perfectly quiet, and there is more security for persons and property than has existed here for many months.

This was Secretary Dana's tribute to the splendid work of the First Brigade.

On April 10th Dana telegraphed to Stanton:

> Permission was given to open all churches yesterday on the general condition that no disloyal sentiments should be uttered. No especial authority was given to omit the prayer for the President, but it was distinctly understood that that prayer would not be said in Episcopal churches. As I have already reported, Weitzel is of the opinion that this prayer should be required of all those denominations of whose service it forms a regular part, but on the urgent advice of Shepley, military governor, and Brevet Brigadier-General Ripley, he did not give a positive order enforcing it.

This was a deliberate untruth. The reverse was the fact, as will be seen by Dr. Minnigerode's protest to me. The *War Records* contain long despatches on the subject, too long to copy here.

Secretary Stanton approved my position, but Weitzel, who had first revoked my order, when he found Stanton was angry with him, deliberately threw the responsibility and blame on me. Dana, detecting it, telegraphed Stanton, "I report the fact, confessing that it shakes a good deal my confidence in Weitzel."

AT THEATRE.

My conference with the theatre managers was followed by the following letter from R. D'Arcy Ogden of the New Richmond theater:

General Edward H. Ripley, Commander U. S. Forces.

Sir:—I have at last succeeded in subduing the somewhat chaotic condition of my *corps dramatique* and I desire, with your approval, on Monday, April 10th, to give a "Grand Entertainment," something I hope worthy of your and the other generals' appreciation. The company is somewhat augmented, and on Monday I present *Macbeth* in which for scenic and musical effects I have been told I have succeeded as well as any of the New York or European theatres. With your approval I desire to decorate the boxes you and the other generals will do me the honor to occupy with headquarters flags, etc., and arranging an overture entirely national, and would like to know the precise moment, as nearly as possible, you would enter the theatre.

The affair fully answered all D'Arcy Ogden's anticipations. Probably the New Richmond Theatre never saw so brilliant a scene. Our brigade and division headquarters supplied him with all the national colors he could use, and the audience, mostly in uniform, was large, brilliant, and enthusiastic.

LINCOLN'S DEATH.

On the 15th of April, order being completely restored, General Patrick, Provost-Marshal General of the Army of the Potomac, was assigned to the command of Richmond and my brigade was moved out into the inner line of works west of the city.

[1] By the sad coincidence of last week's terrible tragedy my mind is painfully swept back to that April morning forty-one years ago when a gallant young captain came to me from General Patrick to arrange the taking over of the

[1] Capt. Philip Schuyler was killed in a railroad accident on the Southern Railway Nov. 29, 1906, and his body consumed in the burning wreck.

command—until but yesterday a highly honored member of this Commandery, a brave soldier, a model citizen, an ideal American gentleman, who, whether fighting to preserve the nation his famous ancestor and namesake fought so well to establish, or in the everyday work of a useful citizenship, always through a well-spent life living up to the highest traditions of his honored name: Philip Schuyler, Captain on the staff of the Provost-Marshal General of the Army of the Potomac.

On Sunday, the 16th, I was in the saddle from early in the morning until noon, riding from regiment to regiment, following up the Sunday morning inspections. When these were finished I rode into the city to pay my formal respects to General Devens, our division commander, as was the custom on Sundays. He occupied the governor's mansion. While here we were stunned and panic-stricken by our first intelligence of the assassination of President Lincoln, and, as first reported, of the whole Cabinet. It had been withheld from the troops twenty-four hours. For the first few hours I felt that we were, like the Roman legions, holding the government in our hands; that in us, the armies of the Potomac, the James, and the Tennessee, were the Country and the Government, and that we, thank God, were yet complete and in the full pride of our power able to control the destiny of the Republic. I rode back in profound dejection, thinking of Snyder and my fateful interview with the President so quickly stricken.

On Saturday, the 15th, I had written to my friends in the north:

> The war is over and we all feel as though we might be mustered out at any moment. I myself feel my occupation gone; do not expect to see an armed rebel or again hear a hostile shot fired. Lee's army is crowding in here, but we feel no more their presence than as though they were the Rutland Lightguard, and now it is all that left of that once grand and glorious Army of Northern Virginia. What a terrible fate has like a lightning stroke fallen upon it.

Shortly after this I took the brigade across the James to

the Broad Rock race-course, three miles south of Manchester, where we went into tents again.

From here it began to be scattered. On the 20th of May I wrote:

Weitzel's colored corps sailed last evening for Texas 25,000 strong. We are breaking up and floating apart like a weakened raft. I have but three of my regiments with me. The 19th Wisconsin is at Fredericksburg, the 81st New York at Williamsburg, and the 98th New York at Danville, but the brigade is not destroyed and they report yet to me.

I feel very strongly toward this approaching short and charming month of June, that is to cap and make complete my three years of war experience. Every day that passes and brings me nearer to a peace footing and citizenship teaches me how strongly —more strongly than I ever dreamed—I have become wedded to this stirring, heroic life; and yet it has become painfully monotonous, and when, day before yesterday, upon the arrival of Governor Pierrepoint, a salute was fired, and the roar of the first gun broke the oppressive and stifling silence of the last two months, regiment after regiment sprang to its feet and gave cheer after cheer of gratified relief.

Those who argue that henceforth the 4th of July will be dull and stupid are wrong. The guns of the 4th will stir the blood of thousands of men who are pining for the excitement of their war days, and it will thrill through them like wine to a faint and thirsty man, or the blast of a bugle to a warhorse.

On the 9th of June I wrote:

To-morrow we have our farewell corps review, after which the gallant Twenty-fourth Army Corps will pass into history.

It will be a sad sight for all. I shall stay with my brigade until the last. My days and nights under Southern skies, under trees, under canvas, under ground, in trenches, on Southern verandas, are rapidly drawing to a close, and as I leave mine night after night, I heave many a sigh as I think that one more has gone never to return.

Within a few days the 9th Vermont regiment, which had won distinction in general orders after hot competition as the finest of the eighteen regiments of Devens's division, left for Vermont to hang its banners in the capitol at Mont-

pelier; lay aside its rifles, and sink away into our Green Mountain valleys to disappear from the sight of man forever, leaving but a dream of its heroic past. Life seemed collapsed in the dull routine of country business, like the explosion of a shell in the air, leaving but little smoke and few fragments behind to tell of the glorious days that had been.

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